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Advertising language as a means of forming students' cross-cultural competence

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Abstract

The process of globalization changes the requirements to the competences of university graduates. That is why many universities in the Russian Federation are aimed at changing and enlarging their curriculum so as to include the courses that can add to the linguistic and cross-cultural competence of students, making them more competitive on the labour market. With this in view, the university administration supports the introduction of programs for additional professional education which enable undergraduates to acquire several qualifications simultaneously. "Translator for professional communication" (namely, economics) is an example of such program which is organized in the Kazan Federal University at the department of foreign languages for economics, business and finance. The program curriculum includes the "Advertising language" course and the purpose of the article is to describe the cross-cultural potential of the discipline mentioned and determine its significance for would-be translators. Cross-cultural competence is viewed as a vital component of translating competence as the process of translation cannot be implemented without the ability to interact cross-culturally. As a result of completing the course students form cross-cultural competence, enhance their linguistic and translating skills; gain the ability to distinguish cultural differences and specific cultural traits, as well as the ability to cope with these differences.

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1. Introduction

Global processes which are underway and concern various fields of life, change the requirements to the qualification of the university graduates. The system of Higher Education is changing significantly due to diversification of the educational industry and a trend for life-long learning. That is why the programs for additional professional education are widely introduced in many universities of the Russian Federation. The department of foreign languages for economics, business and finance at Kazan Federal University is implementing a similar program “Translator for professional communication” Due to this program the students whose major is economics have an opportunity to master their English language skills and to build their linguistic competence. The program curriculum includes various subjects ranging from speaking and translation practice to theoretical courses of linguistics, theory of translation, stylistics. The purpose of the program is not limited to the formation of linguistic competence though. Due to rapid development of international connections, the university graduates should be able to interact cross-culturally, participate in international mobility programs and scholarships. Thus the program “Translator for professional communication” has set the formation of cross-cultural competence as one of its priorities.

The unique course “Advertising language” which is practiced within the framework of the above mentioned program, is considered to have special potential. Within one course, students are given an opportunity to deepen their professional knowledge of marketing and advertising, build their English vocabulary, study advertising language and advertising copy, learn to distinguish ethnic and cultural features verbalized in advertising copies, make for various nations, translate and adapt advertising copies within different strategies.

Thus the main purpose of the article is to consider the process of building cross-cultural competence by means of “Advertising language” course, describe its syllabus, methods and tools used in the teaching process.

2. Approaches to cross-cultural competence and its training.

The world today is characterized by an ever growing number of contacts resulting in communication between people with different linguistic and cultural background (Ulvydiene, 2013). The translator, who serves as an intermediary within the process of interaction between representatives of various cultures, do need the cross-cultural competence because otherwise he/she will not be able to interpret ‘the cultural patterns that are included in the original text’ (ibid., p.1890).

The approaches to cross-cultural communication and its training vary greatly. Dean Ruth G. (2001) states that ‘becoming culturally competent is a challenging prospect’. The reason is that ‘in a postmodern world ... culture is seen as individually and socially constructed’. The author questions ‘how we become competent at something that is continually changing and how we develop a focus that includes ourselves as having differences, beliefs, and biases that are inevitably active’ (ibid., p.623).

On the other hand Geertz (1973). defines culture as denoting ‘a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols – a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life’ (p.89). So each culture has its own foundation which is used by other generations to rely on. Thus we assume that cross-cultural competence can be trained and built. With this in view and following Deardoff (2006) we consider cross-cultural competence as ‘the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitude’ (p.247). Attitudes ‘refer to individual’s capacity to comprehend and appreciate cultural difference’. Knowledge ‘is linked to the ability to understand how culture affects thinking, behavior and interaction’. Skills ‘are reflected in effective communication and intercultural interaction’. (Chiu, Lonner, Matsumoto and Ward, 2013, p.843). The former two components relate to personal characteristics, while the latter deal mainly with performance.

In terms of translation it is necessary to proceed from the premise that it is not just cross-cultural competence that is needed but cross-cultural communicative competence which builds certain attitudes, knowledge and skills into

linguistic competence. Thus, Fantini (2000) develops five components for successful cross-cultural communication: awareness, attitude, skills, knowledge and language proficiency.

The language of the course under consideration is English and there are several reasons for this. Most languages 'derive their connotational values primarily from the countries in which they are the dominant language' (Kuppens, 2009, p.117), while English, in particular English in advertising, symbolizes the values associated with the country it is spoken in. In this respect English is viewed as a 'bicultural language' (symbolizes British and American values) (Cheshire and Moser, 1994, p.462), or even multicultural language, because due to the research provided by Kuppens (2009), most of the studied advertisements, albeit in English, portray the values of the country they are intended for. Due to this reason cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis of the English in advertisements allows learners to build not just bicultural but multicultural competence.

During the course learners also have the opportunity to master the so called 'cultural translation' skill, in which 'the content of the message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original' (Nida & Taber, 1982).

One more important aspect that cannot be ignored is the way cross-cultural communication training is delivered. The process, based on exciting and interesting authentic materials, taken from multiple media, which engages and involves the learner, provides the incentive and contributes significantly to the motivation of the students.

3. Content of the "Advertising language" course

In the process of the course design, several goals were set. The priority was given to providing insight into the typical features of advertising communication in Russian and in English, as well as building the skill of creating, translating advertising copies in both languages.

This primary goal includes several objectives:

- to consider the concepts of advertising, advertising process, advertising communication and advertising copy;
- to familiarize students with the typical structure of the advertising copy;
- to compare and contrast the linguistic features of the advertising copies in Russian and in English;
- to outline the basic translating techniques used in advertising (cultural translation).

As a result of mastering the course, students are supposed to know the specifics of advertising communication in both languages, the principles of making advertising copies; to be aware of the advertising copy linguistics, to distinguish stylistic devices used in the copies; to be able to apply the technique of cultural translation to advertising copies in Russian and in English.

The learners study the "Advertising language course" in their third year, when they have good linguistic background after mastering the courses of country study, stylistics, lexicology, theory and practice of translation. The course consists of thirty six classes (two academic hours each). Each class is a mixture of lecturing, discussion and practice, as this is the very combination that encourages students to participate actively in the process and not to get bored.

The material taught during the course can be divided into two parts. The first is a theoretical one. It is based on marketing approach and is aimed at introducing the fundamentals of marketing. This section includes such topics as advertising and its functions; advertising as a type of communication, both marketing and cross-cultural; advertising campaign and its elements; structure of the advertising copy; copywriter and his job, creative brief. Despite the theoretical nature of the section, students have a lot of opportunities for building cross-cultural competence and translating skills. The typical list of practical tasks includes:

- Analysis of certain advertising campaigns (including Russian, British and American, but not limited to), commenting on their stages and efficiency.
- Making a communicative chain of the advertising process, considering various participants and their interrelations; defining the conditions for an effective advertising communication.

- Analysis of certain advertising copies in English and in Russian for defining their typical features in both languages.
- Analysis of famous slogans in Russian and English to define the techniques used by advertisers for attracting target audience.
- Making up a creative brief for an imaginary product, according to which another group of students will create an advertising copy.
- Analysis of the verbalized part of the advertising copy for reproducing a creative brief.

The second part of the course is devoted to analyzing linguistic and cultural components of advertising copies. It covers such topics as lexical, grammatical, stylistic and syntactic features of the copies in Russian and in English, their comparative analysis, ethnic and cultural background of the copies intended for Russian, American and British target audience. The issues of global and cross-cultural strategies for creating advertising copies as well as their cultural translation are also described and evaluated.

This section suggests the use of various multimedia materials, such as TV and radio commercials, Internet commercials, analysis and interpretation of printed advertisements, as well as banners and billboards. Such approach to teaching gives the students an opportunity to be up to date with the current situation on the advertising market, to analyze the modern language and estimate the trends of its development. The tasks and assignments of the section involve the following:

- Comparative analysis of the copies in Russian and in English with the view to describe their typical lexical and grammatical structure.
- Recognition of stylistic and syntactic devices within the copies and determining their significance.
- Analysis of the parallel copies (the copies in English and in Russian for the same product) with the aim to define the strategy underlying them.
- Defining the world image of the potential target audience, their habits, desires and attitudes (including British, Russian and American, but not limited to) by the verbalized content of copies intended for them;
- Translation and cultural translation of copies from Russian into English and from English into Russian.

4. Methods and tools used in teaching process

Holding a course in advertising language means the use of various teaching methods and techniques. The priority is given to the team and pair work that is connected with the way the advertising agency operates. In any advertising agency it is a team of professionals who work on creation of the advertising copy. Each of them is responsible for his/her part of the project.

As a continuous assessment tool the course includes the multiple choice test, which checks the knowledge of theory. The final assessment is an individual task which suggests that the student should analyze an advertising copy using the following plan:

- Structure of the copy (a headline, a body copy, slogan and echo-phrase).
- Target audience.
- Lexical and grammatical features.
- Stylistic devices and syntactic elements.

The final stage includes cultural translation of the advertising copy in English for the Russian target audience.

5. Conclusion

Having considered several approaches to building cross-cultural competence, we have concluded that the latter is absolutely essential for a would-be translator as without cross-cultural competence he/she will not be able to mediate

between the parties involved in communication and to recognize various cultural patterns of behavior.

Advertising language in itself is a good example of the discourse which could give the full idea of the target audience cultural background. At the same time advertising copy is a type of text which could provide a unique experience of translation.

In the case of advertisement translation the translator has to be very sensitive to the losses and gains of cultural elements. He or she should assess the “weight” of cultural elements in the source text in order to translate them into the target text and bring about the same effect as in the source text. In producing a target text, the translator will enable transcultural communication (Ulvydiene, 2013).

The syllabus of the “Advertising language” course is designed to form the cross-cultural communicative competence of the learners according to the pattern: attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Along with building cross-cultural competence, the course contributes to the linguistic and translating competence of learners.

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